

First, the book is not very empirical—again, partly simply because not many studies exist on weapons play in childhood. Nonetheless, what few do may have offered more empirical grounding for the authors' point. For instance, the 2018 study in which I was involved (along with Sven Smith and Kevin M. Beaver), "Learning to Blast a Way into Crime, or Just Good Clean Fun? Examining Aggressive Play with Toy Weapons and its Relation with Crime," found that early weapons play did not relate to later juvenile crimes. Admittedly, there is very little other research on which the authors can rely in terms of toy guns and other weapons. However, there is a vast, parallel world of research on aggressive play in video games which, after decades of controversy, ultimately revealed that shooting games played little to no role in youth aggression or gun violence (e.g., Aaron Drummond, James Sauer, and Christopher J. Ferguson, "Do Longitudinal Studies Support Long-Term Relationships between Aggressive Game Play and Youth Aggressive Behavior? A Meta-Analytical Examination" (2020) and Simon Goodson, Kirstie J. Turner, Sarah L. Pearson, and Pelham Carter, "Violent Video Games and the P300: No Evidence to Support the Neural Desensitization Hypothesis" (2021). Unfortunately, much misinformation on this also still exists. This could be a good opportunity for the authors to note the absence of links between aggressive play in games and real-life aggression, particularly for early childhood educators who may be particularly prone to "spun glass theory" (the belief that youth are fragile and need to be relentlessly "protected" from anything even mildly untoward such as computer

games or toy guns).

The other criticism I have concerns the authors taking what some in the potential audience for the book might see as a social-justice warrior tone, complete, for example, with such academic usages as "folx" with an x for "folks," all of which I worried could distract from their overall message. They often framed this message as antiracist. To be fair, when talking about early childhood education in areas where gun violence is tragically common, the authors certainly raise important issues. However, these issues are as relevant in poor white communities in Appalachia as they are in Black or Latino communities in inner cities. Indeed, the entire concept of antiracism as a paradigm in relation to this topic has been controversial. This makes the work feel at times as if it indulges in progressive truisms and an academic jargon that perhaps will be off-putting to many who might otherwise enjoy and benefit from the book. I hope that the authors continue their work in this area, and I would encourage them to consider this issue to become more inclusive and accessible to a wider audience.

That said, I certainly think the book is worth a read and offers an important contrast to many individual's assumptions about the purported evils of weapons play.

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—Christopher J. Ferguson, *Stetson University, DeLand, FL*

### **Playhouses and Privilege: The Architecture of Elite Childhood**

*Abigail A. Van Slyck*

Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2025. Introduction,

acknowledgments, notes, and index.  
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Rich families on both sides of the Atlantic built elaborate miniature dwellings to ornament their estates and to please and instruct their children through play. The fully fashioned playhouse, complete with a working kitchen, running water, upholstered furniture and rugs, a fireplace, and even bedrooms, is the ultimate toy. It was lavishly expensive, but it remains popularly admired as an enchanted form associated with an idealized image of childhood. Abigail A. Van Slyck's excellent new book explores the elite playhouse as a serious cultural object, a self-conscious creation that reveals the architectural and social implications of the small house and its uses. These were not just buildings for free play or even for teaching basic self-sufficiency. They encoded forms of elite culture and dynastic expectations for both royal and self-made families, they prepared children for conventional gender roles, and they were harnessed to the machine of publicity.

In seven chapters, Van Slyck covers the historical scope of the freestanding playhouse—how it emerged and was emulated in Europe and the United States between the 1850s and the 1930s. As an architectural historian and scholar of spaces such as libraries and summer camps that wealthy Americans created, she is well equipped to analyze the design of elite institutions and their journey into popular form. *Playhouses and Privilege* is about the architectural framing of a specific type of scripted play, a stage-like set for the drama of diminutive domesticity.

The midnineteenth-century Swiss Cottage built by Queen Victoria and Prince Albert for their children at the Osborne House estate on the Isle of Wight initiated a wave of playhouse buildings. Nearly a century earlier, aristocrats began creating small rural-style dwellings—both for themselves and their children—on their estates to temporarily embrace modest simplicity as an escape from courtly life. The cottage in this context was a symbol of rustic virtue and pastoral freedom fanned by Jean-Jacques Rousseau's notion of the noble savage. The Swiss Cottage was designed to entertain, instruct, and display the royal children. This required a suitable frame, a substantial building set on a stone foundation, whose deep overhanging roof emphasized the "Swiss" style, with carved rafters and a continuous fret-cut balcony, as well as leaded-glass windows and special furniture. Inside and out, innocent rusticity and proximity to nature was contrived for the children who tended the home and the surrounding garden and arranged a museum of natural specimens on the second floor. Albert, who himself had a childhood cottage, encouraged his children to take this playwork seriously. A servant couple lived on the ground floor and guided the children as they gardened with their child-sized tools, prepared simple meals, and hosted tea parties. These play tasks were valued for their unpretentiousness and freedom from court restrictions on behavior, but also, Van Slyck argues, for the stage that they provided to observers, whether they were family members or potential suitors.

American elites emulated this model. In 1886 Cornelius Vanderbilt created a "toy house" for his children at his famed

summer residence the Breakers in Newport, Rhode Island. Like Swiss Cottage, the Vanderbilt playhouse encouraged simple domestic skills such as cooking. The children recalled this activity as a special treat, but the type of play performed in the playhouse was increasingly conspicuous and theatrical, requiring a costume change and an audience. Playing at domestic skills was a game for the children, and it allowed their mother to display maternal concern for her children. For families with nearly unlimited means, the playhouse was an extension of the nursery; it expressed an extravagant concern for the child's well-being, and at the same time it removed them from the main house.

Turn-of-the-century children retreated to their playhouses to cook and entertain, and Van Slyck documents that both boys and girls enjoyed this activity. Yet she argues that in the 1920s and 1930s, during the Red Scare in the United States, some playhouses erected by wealthy industrialists were a mechanism for instilling feminized domestic virtue that revolved around the kitchen, housework, managing household expenses, and hostessing. This play script was of course not necessarily followed, but the stage and its props—working kitchen, custom furniture, linens, and artwork often placed in an Anglo-philic version of the cottage surrounded by a garden—miniaturized domestic labor for girls. These visual codes of simplicity, which also included Arts and Crafts-style woodwork, hammered copper light fixtures, window seats, leaded-glass casement window and thatched roofs, were shifted for boys of this era who were given rustic log cabins outfitted with Navajo rugs to pursue vigorous outdoor activities, music,

and tinkering with mechanical projects.

Although the height of the doorways, windows, and countertops were adapted to children's bodies, adults also used the playhouse. This attention made it a darling of the mass media. The Arts and Crafts garden designer Gertrude Jekyll extolled the playhouse to readers in *Country Life*, and U.S. newspapers published accounts of the Ford and Dodge family playhouses. The Hollywood children Gloria Lloyd and Shirley Temple had their own play dwellings, structures that constructed a public image of childhood for a hungry audience. Shirley Temple's child likeness was the source of her stardom. To embellish this image, the studio erected a small bungalow complete with arbor and surrounding garden, and her family created two other playhouses to promote her image; her stylish 1930s moderne glass block playhouse also sold building materials. Even the royal family played for the camera in the elaborate two-story thatched house that Princess Elizabeth of York and her sister Margaret received as a gift from the Welsh people in 1932. The public appetite for viewing innocent childhood made these seemingly private indulgences into a shared fantasy of children's play as domestic and national virtue enacted in miniature.

The playhouse is a sanctified artifact, and playing house remains an expectation for children's behavior. Yet even solidly built for year-round use, most playhouses do not survive, which makes tracing their histories difficult. What Van Slyck has achieved is important for architectural history and for childhood and play studies. She shows how the collective adoration of children's play idealized the domestic

environment. And moreover, she indicates why middle-class parents have bought or built playhouses for their children ever since.

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—Amy F. Ogata, *University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA*

**The Game That Never Ends:  
How Lawyers Shape the  
Videogame Industry**

*Julien Mailland*

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A law school course in video game law, as I teach it, is largely about intellectual property doctrines (such as copyright, patent, and trademark) as seen through the lens of litigation over video games. Students read court opinions and debate whether designers should need permission before incorporating real people in their games, imitating or modifying another game's graphics or game play, or imposing technological access controls. At its heart, the course asks how intellectual property doctrine can best promote progress, and, ultimately, what progress looks like.

In *The Game That Never Ends: How Lawyers Shape the Videogame Industry*, Julien Mailland does something completely different but provides insights into these questions. Although Mailland explains legal doctrine in language that is easily digestible for nonlawyers, the book is fundamentally a very human history rather than a legal primer or policy pre-

scription. It asks, "how did we get here" and suggests that at least some of the answers reside in the personalities and strategies of the attorneys who negotiated mergers and acquisitions, litigated over the basic technology underlying electronic gaming, wrote employment contracts governing key designers, and oversaw (or overlooked) various aspects of workplace culture. To find these answers, Mailland has conducted impressive research, including deep dives into court files and archives as well as original interviews.

The book tells several distinct but interconnected stories, and it is structured so that each chapter could be enjoyed as a stand alone story. Although this arrangement results in occasional repetition of key facts and makes it somewhat difficult to construct a precise timeline of events, it also demonstrates how the same facts may fit differently into different stories.

The first six chapters explore how intellectual property disputes and lawyering decisions in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s created industry structures and norms. Chapter 2 discusses how Atari obtained a patent on the technology underlying *Pong* but decided to license the (questionably valid) patent to potential competitors rather than suing them. In contrast, Magnavox owned a patent on similar technology and used it to go into the lawsuit business, becoming what modern lawyers would describe as a "patent troll." An early settlement with Atari and some generous court rulings in Magnavox's favor allowed Atari to dominate early markets by sitting back and letting Magnavox sue its potential competitors. Chapter 4 explains how the specifics of California employment law and some